



BUTTE COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

DATE: September 25, 2006

TO: Wastewater Working Group

FROM: Brad

RE: Workgroup Meeting

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**First Meeting**

I would like to thank each member of the Wastewater Working Group for agreeing to be on the committee and for committing to work with Butte County Public Health Department to develop a comprehensive on-site wastewater program that is consistent with current best management and industry standards and that will be generally compatible with state regulations, when they are finally promulgated as required by Assembly Bill 885.

Our first meeting is scheduled as follows:

**Wednesday, October 4, 2006  
3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Association of Realtors Board Room  
1160 East 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Chico**

**Background**

The Departments of Public Health and Public Works presented a report to the Board of Supervisors in October of 2004 recommending that outside consulting services be used in the development of on-site wastewater policies and standards to address, at a minimum; (a) Compliance with AB 885 by the year 2009, (b) Oversight of system operation, maintenance and replacement, (c) Establishment of one or more regional sanitation districts, and (d) Cost recovery for program activities.

Butte County Public Health Department entered into a contract with Questa Engineering in June of 2005 to perform this work. The consultant interviewed staff and held a series of public/community meetings for additional input.

The Final Report was presented to and accepted by the Board of Supervisors on June 13, 2006, and staff presented a draft plan for implementation of the recommendations at the August 8, 2006 Board meeting.

**Current Status of Implementation**

Implementation is taking the form of three distinct program development activities:

1. Formation of a countywide Sanitation District
2. Development of an ordinance to wastewater ponds
3. Development of an ordinance and manual to regulate on-site wastewater systems

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The primary purpose of the Wastewater Working Group is to assist us achieve item 3, the development of an on-site wastewater ordinance and manual. Preliminary drafts of each of these documents are provided for your review.

### **Policy Issues**

When you review the draft documents, please note that the term “sewage disposal system” has been replaced by the term “on-site wastewater system.” The reason for this change is to reflect a fundamental change in our philosophical approach to this issue.

In the new approach, septic systems were considered a stop-gap measure to meet the needs of development prior to connection to a public sewer system. Septic disposal systems were sited and designed with an expected lifespan of 10-15 years. Failure was considered a normal occurrence.

In the current way of thinking, as reflected in the draft ordinance and manual, septic systems are sited and designed to provide treatment as well as disposal of sewage. It is acknowledged that public sewer systems may never be a financially viable option in some rural settings and therefore septic systems are sited and designed for continuous, long-term service with an expectation that they will not fail if properly operated and maintained.

As you review the draft ordinance and manual, numerous policies issues will become apparent. A few of the key issues we must consider during the coming months include:

- What is the best, most streamlined and user friendly permit process?
- Should percolation tests be mandated, optional, or disallowed?
- What is an appropriate variance/waiver/appeal process?
- What should be the standards for vertical separation?
- What should be the role, if any, of engineered fill to achieve vertical separation?
- What should be selected as the design flow for a single family residence?
- How should “alternative” systems be differentiated from “standard” systems?
- What restrictions should be placed on the use of non-water carried systems?
- What standards should be used in septic tank sizing requirements?
- What should be the maximum allowable slope for siting drainfields?
- Should offsite drainfields be allowed using easements?
- Should Appendix 7 be eliminated when the new ordinance and manual are adopted?
- What minimum lot sizes should be required for new development?
- What types or classes of systems should be required to have Renewable Operating Permits?

### **Communication**

In order to facilitate communication between committee members within the working group and with other stakeholders, all meeting agendas and minutes, draft of the ordinance and manual, and other key documents will be posted on Environmental Health’s webpage as well as sent to committee members as via email.

The link to the webpage is: <http://buttecounty.net/Default.aspx?tabid=203>

Again, thank you for participating in this process, and I will look forward to meeting you all on October 4.